A Study of Vote Centers

and their Applicability to the Hoosier Election Process

Foreword, by Todd Rokita

I am pleased to publish this study of Vote Centers and the applicability of such a concept to states like Indiana. Here in Indiana, as with most other states, we have not seen the degree of change in the way we elect our leaders since the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

As I write this, Indiana is finishing a process in which county governments will be reimbursed a total of up to $39 million for upgrading their voting equipment to the best certified technology currently available that is also accessible to people with disabilities. In addition to these reimbursements, we are in the homestretch of developing and employing the first ever statewide voter file which will link all counties in real time with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (where at least half of the state's registrations come from, and where most are lost), the Department of Corrections (to determine if a voter is eligible to vote based on a criminal record), and the Department of Health (to figure out whether a voter is deceased or not).

This massive undertaking is done in an effort to have the most up-to-date list of voters possible to ensure the fairest elections in our state. Indiana counties have also surveyed their polling places and are making the necessary adjustments to make sure these locations are accessible to people with a full range of disabilities. Finally, we have embarked upon a host of other endeavors, such as positive identification at the polling place, absentee ballot process reform, our first ever statewide voter and poll worker education programs, provisional ballot voting, and more - all with one goal in mind: to make the voting experience one in which the voter will want to come back!

Why? For many reasons, but chief among them is the fact that a free society can only remain that way if it is meticulously maintained by an active electorate. In other words, citizens must possess a strong degree of personal responsibility for engaging in civic affairs and exercising civil rights in order to keep their government a servant to them as our founders intended. The idea that citizens decide their leaders—by casting one vote equal to all others- is the cornerstone of that responsibility.

During the course of their studies of other civilizations, some historians describe a cycle of life, where a free and democratic society devolves into a more socialist form due to apathy, complacency and a lack of personal responsibility in the electorate.

It is said that the government of these societies, perhaps innocently enough, will begin to assume the duties and tasks that were never intended to be part of the government's job. As the cycle continues, the government takes over more and more, and the people have less and less in terms of rights and responsibilities. After a period of time, the cycle continues to devolve until the government becomes authoritarian in nature, and a dictatorship; though there are, of course, other ways to reach this point. The people, starving for their former rights and responsibilities, become so oppressed that a revolution occurs, a "free" government is established in the new society, and once again the cycle begins. Thus, historians suggest, we get another 200-year or so cycle.

Here in the United States, we are in year 230 of the 'great experiment' set forth by our founding fathers, and one must ask the question: "Where are we on that cycle?" As elected officials, election administrators, and as citizens of a 'free society,' it is imperative that we not let apathy erode our civic duties.

This is why I believe many Americans and Hoosiers embrace (or should embrace) election reforms such as those described above. The concept of Vote Centers, or whatever term we may decide to give it here in Indiana, needs to be discussed, debated, and perhaps attempted on a pilot basis in our state. It is in this spirit that I offer these observations from a bipartisan delegation I assembled and lead to study the concept and operation of Vote Centers.

My hope is that this publication cultivates a healthy discussion - one that transcends party politics - to determine if Vote Centers could foster the type of civic responsibility needed to maintain our republican form of open and free government.

Inside

Glossary of Terms

Computer Judges

Greeters

Vote Center Computers

Ballot Judge - Vote Center election worker who issues the correct ballot to the voter and provides instruction on completing the ballot.

Computer Judge - Vote Center election worker who checks the voter's ID and signature, and processes the voter in the electronic poll book.

Early Voting - A period of time prior to the election where voters may cast their ballots. There are two kinds of early voting, In Person (where a voter may appear at a central voting location set up before election day and vote exactly the same way as the voter would have on election day), and Voting by Mail (a voter may request that a ballot be sent by mail regardless of whether the voter has an excuse for not voting in person, the voter may return the ballot by mail).

Election Judge - Vote Center election workers, referred to as poll workers in Indiana.

Electronic Poll Book - A poll book connected through a secure, real-time communications line between Vote Centers (or Early Voting Centers) and the Courthouse.

Greeter - The election workers who greet voters as they enter the Vote Center. Greeters remind the voters to have their IDs and signature cards available, help voters fill out signature cards, and direct voters to their next station.

No Excuse Absentee Voting - Absentee voting which allows a voter to cast an absentee ballot for any reason whatsoever.

Signature Card - A card, mailed to all active voters prior to Election Day, which is used to quickly process a voter in the Electronic Poll Book and to capture the voter's signature.

Vote Center - A new concept for voting, which eliminates the traditional precinct voting and creates a type of super precinct allowing voters to cast ballots anywhere in the county. Vote Centers were first used in Larimer County, Colorado.

Introduction

Simply stated, a Vote Center is a polling place where any voter in the county may go to vote. There is no wrong place to vote.

The Vote Centers concept has gained popularity among election administrators nationwide since its inception in an election reform report published by The Election Center. Further, a recent report submitted by the Commission on Federal Election Reform (a.k.a. The Carter-Baker Commission) studied and supported the Vote Centers concept.

Larimer County, Colorado, under the leadership of Clerk-Recorder Scott Doyle, is the best known jurisdiction using the Vote Centers concept.

Secretary Rokita formed a bipartisan delegation of Indiana legislators and local election officials to observe Vote Centers in action during an election conducted in Larimer County, Colorado. The group's mission was to collect information on the operation, establishment, and practicality of Vote Centers; and to objectively discuss whether the concept could be implemented in Indiana.

The purpose of this report is to provide an objective analysis, foster discussion among legislators and election administrators, answer questions, and create new questions to help structure the details that need to be resolved for the Vote Centers concept to work in Indiana.

> A recent report published by the Commission on Federal Election Reform studied and supported Vote Centers.

The Vote Centers Concept

Vote Centers, as developed in Larimer County, Colorado, utilize technology to allow counties to decrease the number of polling places and to allow voters greater flexibility in casting ballots on Election Day.

A county, similar to Larimer County, Colorado, with a population of 200,000 voters likely would create one vote center per 7,500-10,000 active registered voters. The 20-30 Vote Center locations would be chosen based on accessibility and convenience for voters countywide. Churches, Shopping Centers, Hotels, and Government Buildings are locations commonly selected to house Vote Centers in Larimer County.

The Vote Centers are wired (often temporarily) and connected by a secure T-1 line to the county election board office. The connections provide real-time access to the electronic poll book, thereby enabling election officials to ensure each person votes only once.

The obvious feature of Vote Centers that distinguishes them from traditional concepts of polling places is that voters may vote at *any* of the county's Vote Centers at any time while the polls are open. This is a benefit for many voters who live in one area of the county, but commute to another area. A voter dropping children off at school could vote at the Center nearest the school. A voter working downtown could vote at the Courthouse on a lunch break. Voters are able to vote according to their schedules and lifestyles.

Indiana Secretary of State Todd Rokita with Larimer County, Colorado Clerk-Recorder Scott Doyle

Background to Vote Centers in Larimer County, Colorado

Indiana delegation tours the Larimer County, Colorado Elections Department

HAVA

Larimer County, Colorado began to develop the Vote Centers concept in response to the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). In 2002, the United States 107th Congress passed HAVA, which was signed into law in November of the same year. HAVA provided a new legal standard for voting accessibility and election administration in the United States.

Larimer County realized some of the difficulties faced in implementing HAVA. The county had 143 precincts. HAVA's accessibility requirements would have meant replacing many of the county's existing polling places with more accessible sites or imposing costly structural changes on existing locations. Another difficulty faced was the cost of placing new, accessible voting equipment at each of the 143 polling places.

The Vote Center model fulfilled Larimer County's vision of a more efficient, consistent voting system; and it became the solution to implementing the new requirements of HAVA.

New Election Concept

The Larimer County, Colorado Elections Department collaborated over the course of several months to develop the Vote Centers model. This new election concept utilized technology to streamline early voting and decrease the number of polling places. Rather than designating 143 precinct-specific polling places, the county set up several large "Vote Centers" where any voter in the county could vote, regardless of the precinct in which the voter was registered.

Concept in Practice: 2003 Coordinated Election

The 2003 Coordinated Election (similar to Indiana's Municipal Elections) served as the county's pilot Vote Center run. They created 22 Centers throughout the county and spent significant resources educating the public on the new model. Media accounts indicated that voters were able to receive and correctly cast ballots whether they voted near their homes or elsewhere in the county.

If voters moved recently within the county, they could cast their correct ballot close to their new home without having to drive across town to their old precinct polling place. A voter living in the south end of town no longer had to rush home after work to find his/her local polling place. There was no wrong place to vote!. Voters appeared to support the new concept.

Ballot Judges at work on Election Day in Larimer County, Colorado

Concept in Practice: 2004 General Election

In 2004, the Colorado General Assembly passed Senate Bill 153, allowing Vote Centers to be used in a General Election. The Bill required that all Vote Centers be connected via a secure, real-time network in order to process voters and prevent persons from voting twice. Larimer County responded by implementing such a system through a cooperative effort between the Elections Department and Information Management Services. The result was a secure, real-time network that provided live connectivity between all Vote Centers through an encrypted, dedicated server. If a voter cast a ballot at one Vote Center, the voter's voting record would immediately be updated on the electronic poll book at each Vote Center, preventing the voter from casting another ballot at another Vote Center. Larimer County found that this innovation provided secure elections and allowed Vote Centers to process voters more efficiently than using a traditional paper poll book.

Larimer County again utilized the Vote Center Model for the 2004 Primary and General Elections. Media accounts showed there was a high turnout, and that the public voted with efficiency and flexibility. Even when lines were long, the average voter reported casting his/her ballot within 20 minutes of arriving at a Vote Center. All locations finished processing voters shortly after 7:00 p.m (the hour for closing the polls under Colorado law?), and poll workers were able to pack up and leave by 8:00 p.m.

Before Election Day

General Preparations

Approximately one week prior to the election, every active voter in the county receives a voter card. This card is pre-printed with the voter's information before being sent out. This information includes the voter's name, address, precinct, a bar-code, etc. It also includes information on where the Vote Centers are located in the county, when the election takes place, and other information. There is a signature and date line on each card that the voter is instructed to leave blank until he/she arrives at the Vote Center and is asked to complete at that time. If a voter arrives at the Vote Center without the card, blank ones can be completed at that time (this serves to meet signature requirements).

Each election worker is trained to do a specific job at the Vote Center. Only the Vote Center Supervisor is trained for all positions. The positions in each Vote Center are: Election Judges who use the electronic poll books, Election Judges who greet the voter, check photo ID, and watch the voter sign his or her card, Election Judges who distribute the ballot and collect the signature cards, Election Judges who run the provisional ballot section of the Vote Center, and Election Judges who help the voter place their ballot in the optical scan tabulator.

In addition to serving as a Vote Center on Election Day, the Courthouse served as the base of operations for running the election and ensuring that the Vote Centers are operating in the proper manner. Election staff was available to answer phones, monitor the electronic poll book and connectivity, and ensure that Vote Centers are properly staffed and have the supplies necessary to conduct business.

Voter Registration

In Colorado, the voter registration period ends 29 days prior to the election. At that same time, absentee voting by mail begins. Voters need only apply once during the year to vote absentee, and will receive a ballot for every primary, general, or special election of which they are eligible to vote for that year.

Technological Setup

Up to one month before Election Day, crews install temporary T-1 lines in each of the Vote Center sites. These lines are a secure means of transmitting data to and from each Vote Center and the Courthouse. The purpose is to operate an electronic poll list in real-time and provide an effective communication tool between the county's elections office and each Vote Center. A few days before the election, crews install the routers and computers needed to operate the electronic poll list. Computers for the vote centers are obtained by the Larimer County, Colorado, Elections Department through a recycling program. When it is time for the county to replace computer equipment from a county office, it is stored by the Elections Department to be used in Vote Centers for one election cycle.

Poll Worker Training

Training takes place throughout the month before Election Day following submission of election workers from the political parties. In Colorado, each Vote Center has a supervisor (akin to Indiana's Inspector) and a number of Election Judges deemed necessary for each location (Indiana's Clerks, Judges, and Sheriffs). The political Election Judges are trained how to use the electronic poll books in computer labs. Not unlike Indiana's law, which allows a county election board to fill vacant poll worker positions with students who are 16 and 17 year-olds with a unanimous vote, Colorado law allows students to be used to fill empty positions. These students are generally more computer savvy than some of the partisan election workers and generally learn through power point demonstrations.

Each election worker is trained to do a specific job at the Vote Center. Only the Vote Center Supervisor is trained on all positions.

The Indiana Delegation tours Larimer County, Colorado's training facility

Poll Worker Positions in Each Vote Center:

Computer Judges who use the electronic poll books

Greeters who greet the voter

Ballot Judges who distribute the ballot and collect the signature cards

Election Judges who run the provisional ballot section of the Vote Center, and

Election Judges who help the voter place their ballot in the optical scan tabulator.

Voting Process

Early Voting at the Polls

Early Voting begins at designated sites throughout the county 15 days before the General Election, and ends three days before the election. These sites operate much like Vote Centers, and many of them are used as Vote Centers on Election Day. All ballots cast and optical scan readers used for Early Voting are stored in a secure facility. Votes are not tabulated until Election Day.

Election Day at the Polls

Voters enter the main entryway and are immediately met by the Greeter. The Greeter queues voters in line, reminding voters to have their signature card and proper ID available for processing. If the voter did not bring photo identification, the Greeter directs the voter to the provisional ballot station, where a Provisional Judge assists the voter on the provisional voting process. If a voter forgot the voter's signature card, the Greeter also helps the voter fill out a blank signature card.

The voter is then directed to the Computer Station where a Computer Judge checks the voter ID and processes the voter using an electronic poll book. The average voter is processed in 30-45 seconds.

Voters are then directed to the Ballot Station where a Ballot Judge provides each voter with the correct ballot style for that voter. The ballot judge instructs the voter how to correctly complete the ballot, and queues the voter for the next available voting booth.

Once the voter has completed his/her optical scan paper ballot, the voter proceeds to cast his/her ballot. Larimer County uses a ballot card optical scan voting system to tally votes cast. An election judge is available to assist voters, make sure the optical scan correctly accepts the voter's ballot and direct voters to the exit.

Even during high volume times of the day (early morning, lunch and after business hours), the average voter exits the Vote Center within 20 minutes of arrival.

The delegation observed most voters received their ballot between 60-120 seconds after entering the Vote Center) Past experiences in Larimer County suggests that a Vote Center such as this can process 3,000 voters on Election Day.

Ballot tabulators are returned to the Elections office following the lose of the polls. Votes are then tabulated.

Absentee Ballots

Colorado permits "no-excuse" absentee balloting by mail. This law allows a voter to cast an absentee ballot by mail without requiring the voter to state any specific reason.

Absentee ballots are checked by a bi-partisan board of Election Judges 10 days before the election. These ballot envelopes are first checked for a valid signature. If there is a discrepancy, the voter is contacted by mail and informed of the discrepancy. The voter is given the opportunity to rectify the situation.

In Larimer County, Election Judges are trained by law enforcement officials on what tendencies to look for regarding the signatures and urged to use common sense when reviewing the signatures.

Ballots with no discrepancies are transferred to another secure location where a different board of Election Judges open the envelopes and run the ballots through an optical scan tabulator.

Absentee Procedures:

- **Registered voter may at anytime during the year apply for a mail-in absentee ballot**

- **The absentee request is good for the entire year (all elections held)**

- **Ballots are mailed after the voter registration period ends (29 prior to election)**

- **Ballots must be returned before the polls close on election day**

- **Mail-in absentee ballots can be requested up to 10 days prior to election day**

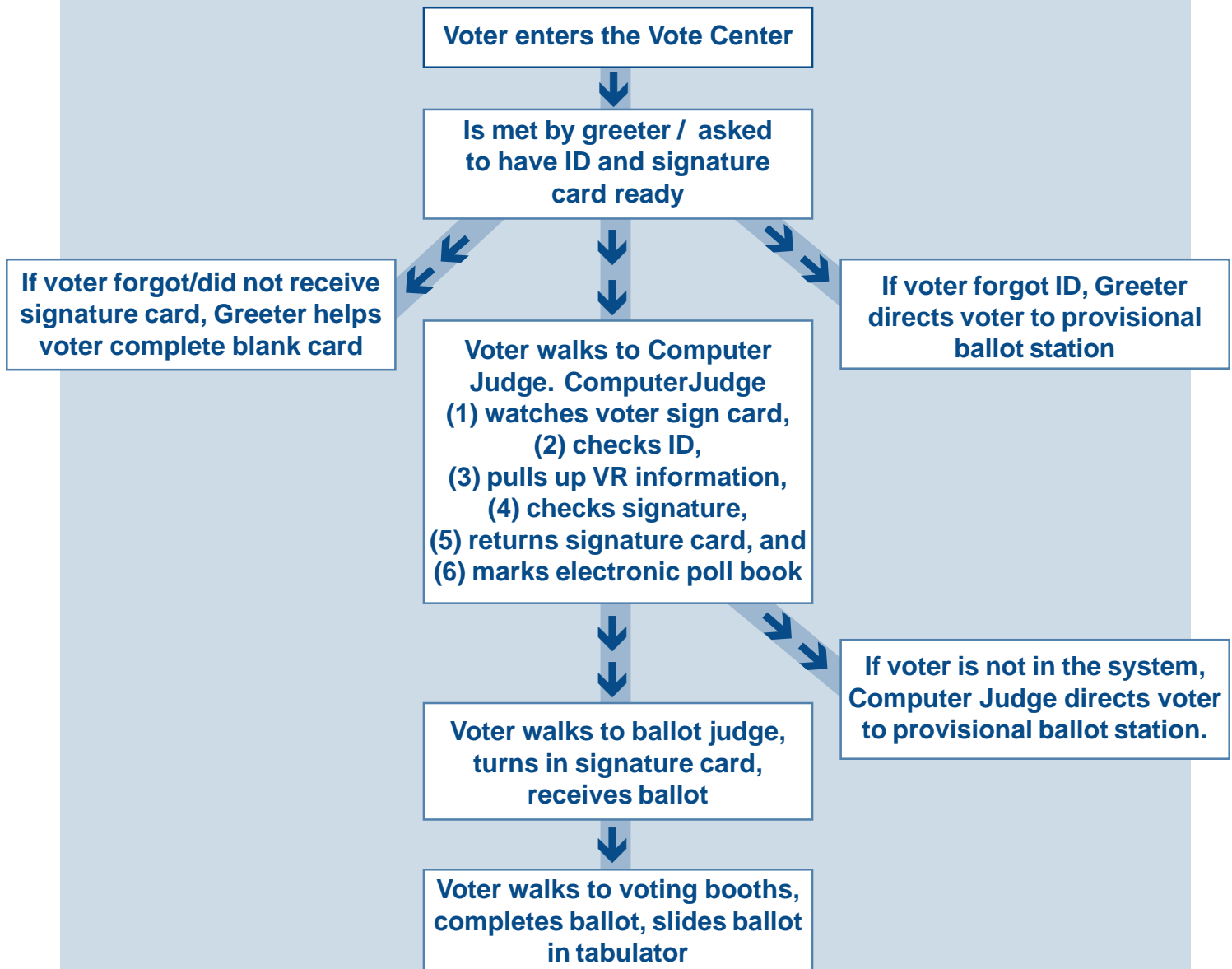| When ballots are returned, the secrecy envelopes are examined for proper signatures (checked against electronic signatures in elec. Poll book) by a bi-partisan team of absentee judges | → | If it is determined the signature is accurate, the ballots are processed as returned and move on | → | If signature looks inaccurate, the voter is informed and given the opportunity to rectify the situation | → | After signature is verified, ballots are removed from their secrecy envelopes by a bi-partisan team of absentee judges and run through the optical scan reader, results are not tabulated until election day | → | Voters CANNOT vote again |

Election Day at the Polls:

Voter enters the Vote Center

↓

Is met by greeter / asked to have ID and signature card ready

If voter forgot/did not receive signature card, Greeter helps voter complete blank card

If voter forgot ID, Greeter directs voter to provisional ballot station

Voter walks to Computer Judge. ComputerJudge (1) watches voter sign card, (2) checks ID, (3) pulls up VR information, (4) checks signature, (5) returns signature card, and (6) marks electronic poll book

If voter is not in the system, Computer Judge directs voter to provisional ballot station.

Voter walks to ballot judge, turns in signature card, receives ballot

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Voter walks to voting booths, completes ballot, slides ballot in tabulator
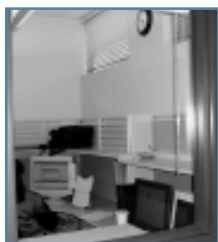
Road Runners

Currently, Indiana uses a large number of Deputy Election Commissioners, chosen by each county's Republican and Democratic political organizations, to run between polling places on Election Day, to deliver absentee ballots, and to assist poll workers as necessary.

"Road Runners" are Larimer County's equivalent to Indiana's traveling Commissioners.

With Vote Centers, delivering absentee ballots to precincts is not needed; however, because of connectivity issues and the possibility of a large number of voters voting at a specific site, ballots, additional computers, and additional election workers may be needed at certain sites. If such a need arises, Road Runners are equipped with additional computer hardware, ballots, and are able to serve as bi-partisan election workers. Road runners can be dispatched to any county Vote Center in a short period of time and help stem the tide of potential long lines or ballot shortages.

"Road Runners" are Larimer County's equivalent to Indiana's traveling Commissioners

Security

The delegation observed that the security of the ballots and electronic poll book went above and beyond what current processes are in place in most jurisdictions across the country.

Early voting ballots and absentee ballots were all stored and handled in secure locations with monitoring by closed-circuit camera and the public (if requested). It was observed that these security measures allowed election workers and the Larimer County, Colorado staff to complete their tasks with relative ease and confidence.

During the early voting period, optical scan ballots were tabulated and sealed in ballot boxes. These boxes were marked with the early voting site (Larimer County, Colorado has 5 sites for early voting that are turned into Vote Centers on Election Day), dated, and stored in a secure room under video surveillance. The Vote Center optical scan tabulators also were secured under lock-and-key and video surveillance. The increased security guaranteed the integrity of the voted ballots.

The electronic poll book in Larimer County, Colorado, was made possible by introducing a secure, real-time network that provided live connectivity between all Vote Centers through an encrypted, dedicated server. Each transaction occurred in real-time and could be monitored by Elections Department staff.

The delegation observed throughout Election Day that the servers performed well, even during peak voting times, and only minor glitches were reported. Indiana delegates were told that the connectivity meets, and at times exceeds, industry security standards.

Larimer County's secure ballot processing and server centers

Vote Center Layout

Based on observations of the delegation, the Vote Center layout is integral to a successful Election Day. The Elections Department staff worked with the Vote Centers facility staff several weeks prior to the election to determine the most efficient layout. Using everything from a measuring tape and common sense to digital cameras and layout software, the Elections Department was able to ensure voters an accessible and efficient experience on Election Day.

Large Urban Center

In the diagram, you can see the layout and flow of a large urban Vote Center in Larimer County, Colorado.

Small Rural Center

Although much smaller than a large urban vote center, smaller rural Vote Centers still use queuing lines to maintain a smooth flow of traffic inside the voting area.

Sample layout of a Large Urban Vote Center in Larimer County, Colorado

General Observations

Advantages

There are a number of advantages to Vote Centers that the delegation observed. Those advantages include: improved and more efficient management by election officials, long-run cost savings, and voter convenience.

By reducing the number of polling places, local election officials can reduce the number of election workers needed to run an election. They will be able to use the "cream of the crop" as election workers. Political parties will have an easier time finding willing, able, and astute workers. By moving to Vote Centers, Larimer County, Colorado's average poll worker age dropped from 74.6 years old to 41 years old. This may help solve the long-term concerns about an aging poll worker population in Indiana.

Vote Centers could reduce the cost of administering an election in the long-run. Reducing the number of polling places will reduce the number of voting systems needed to run an election (particularly for those counties that use optical scan ballot card voting as their principal method of voting). The need to print and store large poll books would be a thing of the past. Time would be saved following the election to update voter registration records would be significant since the information will have already been entered at the polls, and reliance on poll books would be unnecessary. With fewer election workers, the cost of their services and meals (for the counties that provide them) will be decreased. Finally, the cost of making significant structural changes or buying additional accessible machines to comply with HAVA accessibility requirements will be less.

With all 92 counties expected to be connected to the Statewide Voter Registration System by the end of 2005, the comprehensive list of registered voters could easily be transferred into an electronic poll book format with signatures included. The system has bar code capability, and report capability that will help produce the voter signature cards used in Larimer County, Colorado.

The biggest advantage will be to the voter. Long lines will be a thing of the past, as will waiting in those lines only to find that the voter has chosen the wrong location, or worse, the correct location but wrong line (for polling places with multiple precincts). Voters can vote wherever they find it most convenient in their county. The process seems to process voters faster than and more efficiently.

Disadvantages

The delegation observed some disadvantages to the Vote Centers concept also. Some of those disadvantages range from the political to the financial.

People are reluctant to embrace change. With the passage of HAVA, increased need for direct record electronic (DRE) voting systems to meet accessibility requirements has brought a backlash among some activists and voters for certain perceived security weaknesses. Some of these activists (or others) may bemoan perceived insecurity in using an electronic poll list (see page 8 for security information). Some members of our delegation expressed concern that there will likely be less political patronage positions available to fill with the reduced number of election workers needed. Some voters who have voted in the same location for years may be upset it is no longer an optional "Voting Center". Some may have a harder time getting to the polls.

For some counties, the level of technical skill necessary to operate a Vote Center could be a significant hurdle to overcome. In Colorado, Larimer County was able to use computer equipment salvaged from the normal replacement rotation of county equipment. Rather than auction it off or give it away after its useful life has passed, the equipment was used once more for the year's elections, then disposed of through a re-distribution process (to schools, charities, auctions, etc.). A number of systems are needed for Vote Centers to work, and some counties may not have the means to collect them.

Another cost concern is printing all ballot types needed in a county for availability at all of the Vote Centers. Counties with a large number of ballot types (or during primaries where political party officials are on the ballot), a significant number of ballot types would be needed. One way to work around this situation is to provide the type of ballot on de-mand feature that some counties currently use. This feature provides electronic versions of all ballot types and the ballots are printer "on demand" when the voter arrives.

A third cost factor is the connectivity issue. Counties will have to provide a secure means for electronic poll book use. The Vote Centers concept will not work if a voter can vote in multiple locations because the electronic poll book is not connected to all locations and updated on real-time. Even temporary T-1 lines could provide a significant cost to some counties.
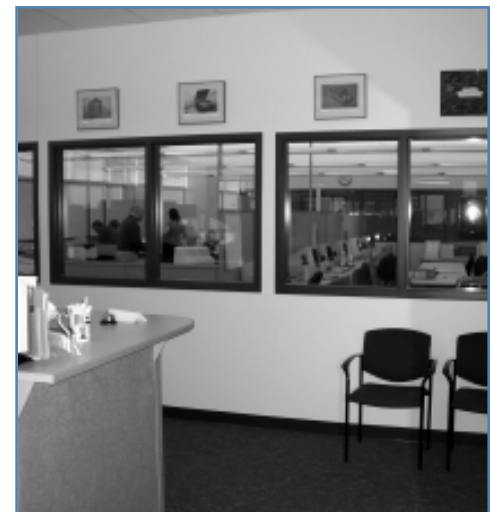
Larimer County's Absentee Ballot Counting Center

BallotStation at a Vote Center

Applicability to Indiana

Counties

For the Vote Centers concept to play a roll in Indiana election administration, both legislative changes at the state level, and changes in county procedures at the local level would be necessary to implement this concept successfully.

Counties would need broader discretion in locating precinct polling places. Current Indiana law permits precincts containing any number of registered voters to be located at the same location and administered by the same precinct election board. However, current Indiana law only allows county election boards to locate a precinct's polling location outside of the precinct if the location is within 5 miles of the precinct's boundary AND there is not an accessible facility available in that precinct. Indiana law would have to be changed to allow precincts to be placed in any location in the county. (IC 3-11-8-3; 3-11-8-4.3)

Counties would need to have connectivity and an electronic poll book available in each of the Vote Centers. There is absolutely no way the Vote Centers concept will work without these functions. The need to have real-time access to the electronic poll book will prevent voter fraud and secure public confidence of the integrity of the election. Indiana law would have to be changed to allow flexibility with the format and production of poll books. Currently, a paper poll book must be printed for every precinct before election day along with the voter's signature on that poll book. Counties will need the ability to operate a poll book electronically, and capture signatures similar to the way Larimer County, Colorado does with a voter signature card. (IC 3-7-29, for example)

Poll Workers

Poll workers will need to be specialized to effectively gain the benefits that Vote Centers may provide. Current law provides for a voluntary certification program for poll workers (IC 3-6-6.5). The law could be amended to require all poll workers in Vote Centers to be certified.

Legislation

Other legislative changes that could assist counties in implementing Vote Centers would be the closing of schools on Election Day in the counties that use Vote Centers. There is generally not a better location for a polling place than a school. Most voters know where the schools are located, the schools are ADA compliant, and there is generally plenty of parking available.

Use of Vote Centers in Indiana elections must be voluntary. As was the case in Colorado, Pilot counties should be designated before this experiment is made in all counties. Vote Centers should be tried first during elections with smaller turnout, such as primaries or municipal elections. Counties using Vote Centers should be able to use state surplus computer equipment a little or no charge to obtain the necessary equipment to operate the electronic poll book in each Vote Center. Vote Centers should be required to be placed in areas with easy access to voters, such as on bus routes where the elderly and disadvantaged can easily access the facility.

Statements from Delegation Members

There were a number of things I observed during our visit to Larimer County, Colorado to view the Vote Centers concept. As a former election administrator, I was amazed at how relaxed the county's chief election official, his assistant, and his chief election deputy were the day before and of the election. The elections office was just as relaxed. I can recall limited sleep, anxious staff, and phones ringing from 5:00AM throughout Election Day during my time as an election administrator.

The Vote Centers were also operated in a fairly relaxed atmosphere. We visited five Vote Centers on Election Day, and there was a relatively short wait for most voters from the moment they entered the facility to the point where they received their ballot. I can recall timing certain voters and discovered that even in the busiest Vote Center, a voter would typically receive their ballot 90 to 120 seconds after entering the Vote Center. Contrast that with the nearly 20 minutes I waited to sign the poll book during the last General Election and I can understand where the voting public would favor this concept.

I believe that in the long run, Vote Centers would save counties money. However, there could be significant start-up costs to the implementation of Vote Centers in some counties. The procurement of hardware and connectivity are the chief cost concerns at the outset. However, savings in other areas would be immediate. Counties would be able to conduct an election with less poll workers, deputy commissioners, and staff hours. Counties would immediately save in contracting out their poll book printing (as many of them do). With the implementation of the Statewide Voter Registration System, a type of electronic poll book is already available.

Vote Centers also will help streamline the election process. In this time of reducing the size and scope of government, a time when our leaders talk of consolidating of government, Vote Centers could be the election community's contribution to this concept.

Finally, and most importantly, with or without the implementation of Colorado's form of early voting and no excuse absentee voting, Vote Centers will help ensure votes are counted. During the last election, there was a fair amount of criticism over the number of provisional ballots that were not counted. In many of these cases, the voter cast a ballot in the incorrect precinct. With Vote Centers, there is not a wrong place to vote, there is just a place to vote. As someone who has devoted most of my career to public service and the four of the last five years to the voting process, I cannot think of a more worthy reason for supporting Vote Centers than ensuring all valid and legal voters cast ballots that will count.

Joseph E. McLain
Indiana Help America Vote Act
Administrator

I felt very fortunate having been invited to participate in the delegation to Fort Collins, Colorado to view vote centers in action.

As I stated in a letter to Secretary Rokita, I took the liberty of mentioning vote centers to some fellow Clerk's and they seemed to feel that Indiana might benefit from vote centers. I am for anything that will help streamline the election process, and I really think vote centers would be a start in the right direction. The prospect of "There is no wrong place to vote" would be a big plus.

In the long run, I feel that it would save the counties money, by being able to cut down on the number of individuals that it would take to run the vote center as opposed to a polling place in every precinct. Not only that, there would not be that many workers to train and would help cut down on errors on Election Day. As we talked about, being able to vote absentee for no reason at all, I think would also have to be considered.

Also, we had talked about the schools closing on Primary and Election day and I heard on the news that the School Corporation(s) in Monroe County has closed their schools for the next two (2) election cycles through 2006 and 2008, so that the schools could be used for voting precincts.

I talked with Jim Fielder, Clerk in Monroe County and he said that he spoke to the president of the school corporations and sent out letters as well, and one corporation have voted to close so they can use the schools and the other corporation might as well.

Very truly yours,

Shelly Hiatt Parris
Clerk Sullivan Circuit Court, and
Incoming President of the Indiana
Association of Circuit Court Clerks

Statements from Delegation Members

December 2, 2005

As Chairman of the House Elections and Apportionment Committee, I attended elections in Larimer County, CO on November 1, 2005 to observe the concept of voting centers. My three main observations are as follows:

1. **Electronic poll books**
   Electronic poll books improve accuracy, networking ability, and election analysis. Any voting centers to be introduced in Indiana must first have fully functional electronic poll books. The cost of developing these poll books is an issue.

2. **Access**
   Voter access to the election process is changed with voting centers. Some voters will have more access because they can vote at any voting center in the county of residence. Voters would not be turned away because they are trying to vote "in the wrong precinct." However, some voters, especially in rural areas, may experience less access because they would have to drive a greater distance since some rural voting precincts may close for cost efficiency. The access of candidates, especially municipal, to greet voters at the polls is changed since voters could vote anywhere in the county.

3. **Poll workers**
   If some rural voting precincts are consolidated for efficiency purposes, less poll workers would be required to train, work at the polls, and pay. It is clear that the work of the office of the County Clerk is simplified with voting centers.

Although the voting center concept is new in concept, I would support allowing Indiana counties to voluntarily try the voting center concept in a well planned pilot program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rep. Andrew P. Thomas
Chairman, House Elections and Apportionment Committee

It appears that a key component to the Vote Center process in Colorado is the opportunity for "no excuse" absentee voting. Since the 1996 election cycle, voting by mail participation has increased 400%. This combined with early voting in-person at satellite voting centers has served to increase overall voter turnout. In-person early voting has jumped 400% since 1996. In that same time frame, actual Election Day, in-person voting has decreased by over 33%.

It is our suggestion that Vote Centers be allowed as a pilot project in a small number of Indiana counties. However, it is obvious when considering the data that "no excuse" absentee balloting by mail is a necessary component to the success of such a program, and therefore must be instituted for the potential success of the Vote Center project.

Respectfully Submitted November 30, 2005.

Ed Mahern
State Representative

Joel Miller
Member, Marion County Board of Voter Registration

Larimer County, Colorado Election Statistics

Past Elections

Election	Year	Total Reg	Active Reg	Total Voted	Entities	Precincts	Provisional	Mail-Out	Walk-Out	In-Office	Total	%
General	1980	76,648		65,364		61,519					3,845	85.28
Primary	1980	65,893		18,957		18,519					438	28.77
General	1982	79,321		53,996		52,067					1,929	67.87
Primary	1982	75,249		14,279		13,935					344	19.00
General	1984	90,050		76,556		71,272					5,284	85.01
Primary	1984	80,056		12,224		11,814					410	15.27
General	1986	104,283		60,313		57,732					2,581	57.84
Primary	1986	95,605		15,197		14,720					477	15.90
General	1988	116,207		84,689	6	78,371					6,318	72.88
Primary	1988	107,669		7,941	2	7,642					299	7.38
General	1990	114,555		62,491	2	59,392					3,099	54.55
Primary	1990	110,150		20,265	2	19,683					582	13.14
General	1992	122,446		100,755	4	80,650					20,105	82.29
Primary	1992	109,321		24,415	2	23,410					1,005	22.33
Pres Primary	1992	101,309		25,459	2	24,931					539	25.13
Coordinated	1993	117,463		32,462	9	29,910					2,552	27.64
Primary	1994	124,027		18,722	2	15,419					3,303	15.10
General	1994	129,754		74,592	10	52,981		9,622	7,070	5,990	22,682	57.49
Coordinated	1995	123,968		39,430	4	31,412		3,088	1,530	3,734	8,352	31.81
Pres Primary	1996	127,856		19,016	2	16,762		599	195	1,565	2,359	14.87
Primary	1996	133,557		19,952	2	17,317		955	233	1,447	2,635	14.94
General	1996	143,047		99,992	9	71,278		12,474	5060	11,103	28,637	69.90
Coordinated	1997	152,945		40,013	16	30,653		2,236	1,140	5,984	9,360	26.16
Primary	1998	162,172		22,184	2	19,340		495	162	1,908	2,565	13.68
General	1998	166,700		86,875	13	56,484		13,877	5,524	10,969	30,370	51.77
Coordinated	1999	176,043		48,321	18	34,511		5,157	2,341	6,312	13,810	27.45
Pres Primary	2000	179,184		13,231	2	8,792		874	71	3,488	4,433	7.38
Mail Ballot	6/6/00	131,525		39,288	1							29.85
Primary	8/8/00	182,803		9,019	2	6,584		857	119	1459	2435	4.93
General	11/7/00	191,124		119,201	17	57,582		40,355	7,278	13,769	61,402	62.37
Coordinated	11/06/01	178,216		60,125	15			60,125				33.74
Primary	08/13/02	136,287		24,133	2	7,208	110	15,673		1,142	16,815	17.70
General	11/05/02	188,168	142,561	95,276	7	49,716	797	35,651	1,584	8,325	45,560	66.83
Coordinated	11/04/03	176,574	125,954	53,259	14	19,754	109	23,446	Did not allow	9,950	33,396	42.48
Coordinated Primary	08/10/04	183,900	138,577	41,448	3	15,942	108	20,755	Did not allow	4,643	25,398	29.91
General	11/02/04	199,129	155,441	147,112	16	52,481	1798	47,115		45,718	92,833	94.64

www.co.larimer.co.us/elections/election_stats.htm

Larimer County, Colorado Election Statistics

Vote Center Elections

	2003 Coordinated Election	2004 Primary Election	2004 General Election
Number of Vote Centers	22	21	31
Total Voter Turnout / Total Active Voters	53,476/125,954	41,448/147,387	147,112/157,903
Total Voter Turnout at Vote Centers	19,754	15,924	52,481
Average Voter Turnout per Vote Center	923	682	1,563
Highest Voter Turnout for Any One Vote Center	2,415	1,750	3,404
Lowest Voter Turnout for Any One Vote Center	77	116	256
Total Number of Poll Workers at Vote Centers	305	218	484
Average Number of Poll Workers per Vote Center	14	10	16
Highest Number of Poll Workers for Any One Vote Center	28	14	28
Lowest Number of Poll Workers for Any One Vote Center	4	3	5

http://www.co.larimer.co.us/elections/votecenters_statistics.htm

More Information About Vote Centers

Please visit **www.sos.IN.gov** for:

- Copies of this report

- Relevant Colorado Statutes

- Proposed Vote Centers Legislation for Indiana

- Larimer County, Colorado Slide Presentation

Acknowledgments

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A special thank you and appreciation to the Indiana delegation for their bi-partisan leadership, time and hard work. Thank you:

The Honorable Todd Rokita, Indiana Secretary of State
The Honorable Dale Brewer, Porter Circuit Court Clerk
The Honorable Linda Grass, Hancock Circuit Court Clerk
The Honorable James A. Lewis, Jr., Indiana State Senator
The Honorable Edmund Mahern, Indiana State Representative
Mr. Joel Miller, Marion County Board of Voter Registration Member
The Honorable Shelly Hiatt Parris, Sullivan Circuit Court Clerk
The Honorable Andrew Thomas, Indiana State Representative
Mr. Kyle Walker, Marion County Board of Voter Registration Member

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